

# Damage Book

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY

OU\_210017

UNIVERSAL  
LIBRARY



OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 821.91/4412 Accession No. 21025

Author Yeats, W.B.

Title Last Poems & Plays.

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

---



## LAST POEMS AND PLAYS



LAST POEMS  
&  
PLAYS

BY  
W. B. YEATS

LONDON  
MACMILLAN & CO. LTD  
1940

**COPYRIGHT**

**PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN  
BY R. & R. CLARK, LIMITED, EDINBURGH**

# CONTENTS

## LAST POEMS

	PAGE
THE GYRES . . . . .	3
<u>LAPIS LAZULI</u> ✓ . . . . .	4
IMITATED FROM THE JAPANESE . . . . .	6
SWEET DANCER . . . . .	7
THE THREE BUSHES, <del>1127</del> . . . . .	8
THE LADY'S FIRST SONG . . . . .	11
THE LADY'S SECOND SONG . . . . .	12
THE LADY'S THIRD SONG . . . . .	13
THE LOVER'S SONG. . . . .	14
THE CHAMBERMAID'S FIRST SONG. . . . .	15
THE CHAMBERMAID'S SECOND SONG . . . . .	16
AN ACRE OF GRASS . . . . .	17
WHAT THEN? . . . . .	18
BEAUTIFUL LOFTY THINGS . . . . .	19
A CRAZED GIRL . . . . .	20
TO DOROTHY WELLESLEY . . . . .	21
THE CURSE OF CROMWELL . . . . .	22
ROGER CASEMENT . . . . .	24
THE GHOST OF ROGER CASEMENT . . . . .	25
THE O'RAHILLY . . . . .	27
COME GATHER ROUND ME, PARNELLITES . . . . .	29
THE WILD OLD WICKED MAN . . . . .	31
THE GREAT DAY . . . . .	34
PARNELL . . . . .	35
WHAT WAS LOST . . . . .	36

	PAGE
THE SPUR . . . . .	37
A DRUNKEN MAN'S PRAISE OF SOBRIETY . . . . .	38
THE PILGRIM . . . . .	39
COLONEL MARTIN . . . . .	41
A MODEL FOR THE LAUREATE . . . . .	44
THE OLD STONE CROSS . . . . .	45
THE SPIRIT MEDIUM . . . . .	46
THOSE IMAGES . . . . .	47
THE MUNICIPAL GALLERY REVISITED . . . . .	48
ARE YOU CONTENT? . . . . .	51
THREE SONGS TO THE ONE BURDEN . . . . .	52
IN TARA'S HALLS . . . . .	56
THE STATUES . . . . .	57
NEWS FROM THE DELPHIC ORACLE . . . . .	59
THREE MARCHING SONGS . . . . .	61
LONG-LEGGED FLY . . . . .	65
A BRONZE HEAD . . . . .	67
A STICK OF INCENSE . . . . .	69
JOHN KINSELLA'S LAMENT FOR MRS. MARY MOORE . . . . .	70
HOUND VOICE . . . . .	72
HIGH TALK . . . . .	73
THE APPARITIONS . . . . .	74
A NATIVITY . . . . .	75
WHY SHOULD NOT OLD MEN BE MAD? . . . . .	76
THE STATESMAN'S HOLIDAY . . . . .	77
CRAZY JANE ON THE MOUNTAIN . . . . .	79
THE CIRCUS ANIMALS' DESERTION . . . . .	80
POLITICS . . . . .	82

	PAGE
THE MAN AND THE ECHO . . . . .	83
CUCHULAIN COMFORTED . . . . .	85
THE BLACK TOWER . . . . .	87
UNDER BEN BULBEN . . . . .	89

## LAST PLAYS

PURGATORY . . . . .	97
THE DEATH OF CUCHULAIN . . . . .	111



# LAST POEMS

1936-1939



## SWEET DANCER

The girl goes dancing there  
On the leaf-sown, new-mown, smooth  
Grass plot of the garden ;  
Escaped from bitter youth,  
Escaped out of her crowd,  
Or out of her black cloud.

*Ah, dancer, ah, sweet dancer !*

If strange men come from the house  
To lead her away, do not say  
That she is happy being crazy ;  
Lead them gently astray ;  
Let her finish her dance,  
Let her finish her dance.

*Ah, dancer, ah, sweet dancer !*

## THE THREE BUSHES

*(An incident from the 'Historia mei Temporis' of the  
Abbé Michel de Bourdeille)*

Said lady once to lover,  
‘None can rely upon  
A love that lacks its proper food ;  
And if your love were gone  
How could you sing those songs of love ?  
I should be blamed, young man.’  
*O my dear, O my dear.*

‘Have no lit candles in your room,’  
That lovely lady said,  
‘That I at midnight by the clock  
May creep into your bed,  
For if I saw myself creep in  
I think I should drop dead.’  
*O my dear, O my dear.*

‘I love a man in secret,  
Dear chambermaid,’ said she.  
‘I know that I must drop down dead  
If he stop loving me,  
Yet what could I but drop down dead  
If I lost my chastity ?’  
*O my dear, O my dear.*

‘So you must lie beside him  
And let him think me there,  
And maybe we are all the same  
Where no candles are,

And maybe we are all the same  
That strip the body bare.'

*O my dear, O my dear.*

But no dogs barked, and midnights chimed,  
And through the chime she'd say,  
' That was a lucky thought of mine,  
My lover looked so gay ' ;  
But heaved a sigh if the chambermaid  
Looked half asleep all day.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

' No, not another song,' said he,  
' Because my lady came  
A year ago for the first time  
At midnight to my room,  
And I must lie between the sheets  
When the clock begins to chime.'

*O my dear, O my dear.*

' A laughing, crying, sacred song,  
A leching song,' they said.  
Did ever men hear such a song ?  
No, but that day they did.  
Did ever man ride such a race ?  
No, not until he rode.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

But when his horse had put its hoof  
Into a rabbit-hole  
He dropped upon his head and died.  
His lady saw it all

And dropped and died thereon, for she  
Loved him with her soul.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

The chambermaid lived long, and took  
Their graves into her charge,  
And there two bushes planted  
That when they had grown large  
Seemed sprung from but a single root  
So did their roses merge.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

When she was old and dying,  
The priest came where she was ;  
She made a full confession.  
Long looked he in her face,  
And O he was a good man  
And understood her case.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

He bade them take and bury her  
Beside her lady's man,  
And set a rose-tree on her grave,  
And now none living can,  
When they have plucked a rose there,  
Know where its roots began.

*O my dear, O my dear.*

## THE ·LADY'S FIRST SONG

I turn round  
Like a dumb beast in a show,  
Neither know what I am  
Nor where I go,  
My language beaten  
Into one name ;  
I am in love  
And that is my shame.  
What hurts the soul  
My soul adores,  
No better than a beast  
Upon all fours.

## THE LADY'S SECOND SONG

What sort of man is coming  
To lie between your feet ?  
What matter, we are but women.  
Wash ; make your body sweet ;  
I have cupboards of dried fragrance,  
I can strew the sheet.

*The Lord have mercy upon us.*

He shall love my soul as though  
Body were not at all,  
He shall love your body  
Untroubled by the soul,  
Love cram love's two divisions  
Yet keep his substance whole.

*The Lord have mercy upon us.*

Soul must learn a love that is  
Proper to my breast,  
Limbs a love in common  
With every noble beast.  
If soul may look and body touch,  
Which is the more blest ?

*The Lord have mercy upon us.*

## THE LADY'S THIRD SONG

When you and my true lover meet  
And he plays tunes between your feet,  
Speak no evil of the soul,  
Nor think that body is the whole,  
For I that am his daylight lady  
Know worse evil of the body ;  
But in honour split his love  
Till either neither have enough,  
That I may hear if we should kiss  
A contrapuntal serpent hiss,  
You, should hand explore a thigh,  
All the labouring heavens sigh.

## THE LOVER'S SONG

Bird sighs for the air,  
Thought for I know not where,  
For the womb the seed sighs.  
Now sinks the same rest  
On mind, on nest,  
On straining thighs.

## THE CHAMBERMAID'S FIRST SONG

How came this ranger  
Now sunk in rest,  
Stranger with stranger,  
On my cold breast ?  
What's left to sigh for,  
Strange night has come ;  
God's love has hidden him  
Out of all harm,  
Pleasure has made him  
Weak as a worm.

## THE CHAMBERMAID'S SECOND SONG

From pleasure of the bed,  
Dull as a worm,  
His rod and its butting head  
Limp as a worm,  
His spirit that has fled  
Blind as a worm.

## AN ACRE OF GRASS

Picture and book remain,  
An acre of green grass  
For air and exercise,  
Now strength of body goes ;  
Midnight, an old house  
Where nothing stirs but a mouse.

My temptation is quiet.  
Here at life's end  
Neither loose imagination,  
Nor the mill of the mind  
Consuming its rag and bone,  
Can make the truth known.

Grant me an old man's frenzy,  
Myself must I remake  
Till I am Timon and Lear  
Or that William Blake  
Who beat upon the wall  
Till Truth obeyed his call ;

A mind Michael Angelo knew  
That can pierce the clouds,  
Or inspired by frenzy  
Shake the dead in their shrouds ;  
Forgotten else by mankind,  
An old man's eagle mind.

## WHAT THEN ?

His chosen comrades thought at school  
He must grow a famous man ;  
He thought the same and lived by rule,  
All his twenties crammed with toil ;  
*' What then ? ' sang Plato's ghost. ' What then ? '*

Everything he wrote was read,  
After certain years he won  
Sufficient money for his need,  
Friends that have been friends indeed ;  
*' What then ? ' sang Plato's ghost. ' What then ? '*

All his happier dreams came true —  
A small old house, wife, daughter, son,  
Grounds where plum and cabbage grew,  
Poets and Wits about him drew ;  
*' What then ? ' sang Plato's ghost. ' What then ? '*

*' The work is done,' grown old he thought,  
' According to my boyish plan ;  
Let the fools rage, I swerved in naught,  
Something to perfection brought ; '  
But louder sang that ghost, ' What then ? '*

## BEAUTIFUL LOFTY THINGS

Beautiful lofty things : O'Leary's noble head ;  
My father upon the Abbey stage, before him a raging  
crowd :  
' This Land of Saints,' and then as the applause died  
out,  
' Of plaster Saints ' ; his beautiful mischievous head  
thrown back.  
Standish O'Grady supporting himself between the  
tables  
Speaking to a drunken audience high nonsensical  
words ;  
Augusta Gregory seated at her great ormolu table,  
Her eightieth winter approaching : ' Yesterday he  
threatened my life.  
I told him that nightly from six to seven I sat at this  
table,  
The blinds drawn up ' ; Maud Gonne at Howth station  
waiting a train,  
Pallas Athene in that straight back and arrogant head :  
All the Olympians ; a thing never known again.

## A CRAZED GIRL

That crazed girl improvising her music,  
Her poetry, dancing upon the shore,  
Her soul in division from itself  
Climbing, falling she knew not where,  
Hiding amid the cargo of a steamship,  
Her knee-cap broken, that girl I declare  
A beautiful lofty thing, or a thing  
Heroically lost, heroically found.

No matter what disaster occurred  
She stood in desperate music wound,  
Wound, wound, and she made in her triumph  
Where the bales and the baskets lay  
No common intelligible sound  
But sang, 'O sea — starved, hungry sea.'

## TO DOROTHY WELLESLEY

Stretch towards the moonless midnight of the trees,  
As though that hand could reach to where they stand,  
And they but famous old upholsteries  
Delightful to the touch ; tighten that hand  
As though to draw them closer yet.

Rammed full

Of that most sensuous silence of the night  
(For since the horizon's bought strange dogs are still)  
Climb to your chamber full of books and wait,  
No books upon the knee, and no one there  
But a Great Dane that cannot bay the moon  
And now lies sunk in sleep.

What climbs the stair ?

Nothing that common women ponder on  
If you are worth my hope ! Neither Content  
Nor satisfied Conscience, but that great family  
Some ancient famous authors misrepresent,  
The Proud Furies each with her torch on high.

## THE CURSE OF CROMWELL

You ask what I have found, and far and wide I go :  
Nothing but Cromwell's house and Cromwell's  
murderous crew,  
The lovers and the dancers are beaten into the clay,  
And the tall men and the swordsmen and the horsemen,  
where are they ?  
And there is an old beggar wandering in his pride —  
His fathers served their fathers before Christ was  
crucified.

*O what of that, O what of that,  
What is there left to say ?*

All neighbourly content and easy talk are gone,  
But there's no good complaining, for money's rant  
is on.  
He that's mounting up must on his neighbour mount,  
And we and all the Muses are things of no account.  
They have schooling of their own, but I pass their  
schooling by,  
What can they know that we know that know the  
time to die ?

*O what of that, O what of that,  
What is there left to say ?*

But there's another knowledge that my heart destroys,  
As the fox in the old fable destroyed the Spartan boy's,  
Because it proves that things both can and cannot be ;  
That the swordsmen and the ladies can still keep  
company,

Can pay the poet for a verse and hear the fiddle sound,  
That I am still their servant though all are under-  
ground.

*O what of that, O what of that,  
What is there left to say ?*

I came on a great house in the middle of the night,  
Its open lighted doorway and its windows all alight,  
And all my friends were there and made me welcome  
too ;

But I woke in an old ruin that the winds howled  
through ;

And when I pay attention I must out and walk  
Among the dogs and horses that understand my talk.

*O what of that, O what of that,  
What is there left to say ?*

## ROGER CASEMENT

*(After reading 'The Forged Casement Diaries' by Dr. Maloney)*

I say that Roger Casement  
Did what he had to do.  
He died upon the gallows,  
But that is nothing new.

Afraid they might be beaten  
Before the bench of Time,  
They turned a trick by forgery  
And blackened his good name.

A perjurer stood ready  
To prove their forgery true ;  
They gave it out to all the world,  
And that is something new ;

For Spring Rice had to whisper it,  
Being their Ambassador,  
And then the speakers got it  
And writers by the score.

Come Tom and Dick, come all the troop  
That cried it far and wide,  
Come from the forger and his desk,  
Desert the perjurer's side ;

Come speak your bit in public  
That some amends be made  
To this most gallant gentleman  
That is in quicklime laid.

## THE GHOST OF ROGER CASEMENT

O what has made that sudden noise ?  
What on the threshold stands ?  
It never crossed the sea because  
John Bull and the sea are friends ;  
But this is not the old sea  
Nor this the old seashore.  
What gave that roar of mockery,  
That roar in the sea's roar ?  
*The ghost of Roger Casement*  
*Is beating on the door.*

John Bull has stood for Parliament,  
A dog must have his day,  
The country thinks no end of him,  
For he knows how to say,  
At a beanfeast or a banquet,  
That all must hang their trust  
Upon the British Empire,  
Upon the Church of Christ.  
*The ghost of Roger Casement*  
*Is beating on the door.*

John Bull has gone to India  
And all must pay him heed,  
For histories are there to prove  
That none of another breed  
Has had a like inheritance,  
Or sucked such milk as he,

And there's no luck about a house  
If it lack honesty.

*The ghost of Roger Casement  
Is beating on the door.*

I poked about a village church  
And found his family tomb  
And copied out what I could read  
In that religious gloom ;  
Found many a famous man there ;  
But fame and virtue rot.  
Draw round, beloved and bitter men,  
Draw round and raise a shout ;  
*The ghost of Roger Casement  
Is beating on the door.*

## THE O'RAHILLY

Sing of the O'Rahilly,  
Do not deny his right ;  
Sing a ' the ' before his name ;  
Allow that he, despite  
All those learned historians,  
Established it for good ;  
He wrote out that word himself,  
He christened himself with blood.  
*How goes the weather ?*

Sing of the O'Rahilly  
That had such little sense  
He told Pearse and Connolly  
He'd gone to great expense  
Keeping all the Kerry men  
Out of that crazy fight ;  
That he might be there himself  
Had travelled half the night.  
*How goes the weather ?*

' Am I such a craven that  
I should not get the word  
But for what some travelling man  
Had heard I had not heard ? '  
Then on Pearse and Connolly  
He fixed a bitter look :  
' Because I helped to wind the clock  
I come to hear it strike.'  
*How goes the weather ?*

What remains to sing about  
But of the death he met  
Stretched under a doorway  
Somewhere off Henry Street ;  
They that found him found upon  
The door above his head  
' Here died the O'Rahilly.  
R.I.P.' writ in blood.

*How goes the weather ?*

## COME GATHER ROUND ME, PARNELLITES

Come gather round me, Parnellites,  
And praise our chosen man ;  
Stand upright on your legs awhile,  
Stand upright while you can,  
For soon we lie where he is laid,  
And he is underground ;  
Come fill up all those glasses  
And pass the bottle round.

And here's a cogent reason,  
And I have many more,  
He fought the might of England  
And saved the Irish poor,  
Whatever good a farmer's got  
He brought it all to pass ;  
And here's another reason,  
That Parnell loved a lass.

And here's a final reason,  
He was of such a kind  
Every man that sings a song  
Keeps Parnell in his mind.  
For Parnell was a proud man,  
No prouder trod the ground,  
And a proud man's a lovely man,  
So pass the bottle round.

The Bishops and the Party  
That tragic story made,

A husband that had sold his wife  
And after that betrayed ;  
But stories that live longest  
Are sung above the glass,  
And Parnell loved his country,  
And Parnell loved his lass.

## THE WILD OLD WICKED MAN

‘ Because I am mad about women  
I am mad about the hills,’  
Said that wild old wicked man  
Who travels where God wills.

‘ Not to die on the straw at home,  
Those hands to close these eyes,  
That is all I ask, my dear,  
From the old man in the skies.

*Daybreak and a candle-end.*

‘ Kind are all your words, my dear,  
Do not the rest withhold.  
Who can know the year, my dear,  
When an old man’s blood grows cold ?  
I have what no young man can have  
Because he loves too much.

Words I have that can pierce the heart,  
But what can he do but touch ? ’

*Daybreak and a candle-end.*

Then said she to that wild old man,  
His stout stick under his hand,  
‘ Love to give or to withhold  
Is not at my command.  
I gave it all to an older man :  
That old man in the skies.  
Hands that are busy with His beads  
Can never close those eyes.’

*Daybreak and a candle-end.*

‘ Go your ways, O go your ways,  
I choose another mark,  
Girls down on the seashore  
Who understand the dark ;  
Bawdy talk for the fishermen ;  
A dance for the fisher-lads ;  
When dark hangs upon the water  
They turn down their beds.

*Daybreak and a candle-end.*

‘ A young man in the dark am I,  
But a wild old man in the light,  
That can make a cat laugh, or  
Can touch by mother wit  
Things hid in their marrow-bones  
From time long passed away,  
Hid from all those warty lads  
That by their bodies lay.

*Daybreak and a candle-end.*

‘ All men live in suffering,  
I know as few can know,  
Whether they take the upper road  
Or stay content on the low,  
Rower bent in his row-boat  
Or weaver bent at his loom,  
Horseman erect upon horseback  
Or child hid in the womb.

*Daybreak and a candle-end.*

‘ That some stream of lightning  
From the old man in the skies

Can burn out that suffering  
No right-taught man denies.  
But a coarse old man am I,  
I choose the second-best,  
I forget it all awhile  
Upon a woman's breast.'  
*Daybreak and a candle-end.*

## THE GREAT DAY

Hurrah for revolution and more cannon-shot !  
A beggar upon horseback lashes a beggar on foot.  
Hurrah for revolution and cannon come again !  
The beggars have changed places, but the lash goes on.

## PARNELL

Parnell came down the road, he said to a cheering man :

‘ Ireland shall get her freedom and you still break stone.’

## WHAT WAS LOST

I sing what was lost and dread what was won,  
I walk in a battle fought over again,  
My king a lost king, and lost soldiers my men ;  
Feet to the Rising and Setting may run,  
They always beat on the same small stone.

## THE SPUR

You think it horrible that lust and rage  
Should dance attention upon my old age ;  
They were not such a plague when I was young ;  
What else have I to spur me into song ?

## A DRUNKEN MAN'S PRAISE OF SOBRIETY

Come swish around, my pretty punk,  
And keep me dancing still  
That I may stay a sober man  
Although I drink my fill.  
Sobriety is a jewel  
That I do much adore ;  
And therefore keep me dancing  
Though drunkards lie and snore.  
O mind your feet, O mind your feet,  
Keep dancing like a wave,  
And under every dancer  
A dead man in his grave.  
No ups and downs, my pretty,  
A mermaid, not a punk ;  
A drunkard is a dead man,  
And all dead men are drunk.

## THE PILGRIM

I fasted for some forty days on bread and buttermilk,  
For passing round the bottle with girls in rags or silk,  
In country shawl or Paris cloak, had put my wits astray,  
And what's the good of women, for all that they can say  
*Is fol de rol de rolly O.*

Round Lough Derg's holy island I went upon the stones,  
I prayed at all the Stations upon my marrow-bones,  
And there I found an old man, and though I prayed all  
day  
And that old man beside me, nothing would he say  
*But fol de rol de rolly O.*

All know that all the dead in the world about that place  
are stuck,  
And that should mother seek her son she'd have but  
little luck  
Because the fires of Purgatory have ate their shapes away ;  
I swear to God I questioned them, and all they had to  
say  
*Was fol de rol de rolly O.*

A great black ragged bird appeared when I was in the  
boat ;  
Some twenty feet from tip to tip had it stretched rightly  
out,  
With flopping and with flapping it made a great display,  
But I never stopped to question, what could the boat-  
man say  
*But fol de rol de rolly O.*

Now I am in the public-house and lean upon the wall,  
So come in rags or come in silk, in cloak or country  
shawl,  
And come with learned lovers or with what men you  
may,  
For I can put the whole lot down, and all I have to say  
*Is fol de rol de rolly O.*

# COLONEL MARTIN

## I

The Colonel went out sailing,  
He spoke with Turk and Jew,  
With Christian and with Infidel,  
For all tongues he knew.  
' O what's a wifeless man ? ' said he,  
And he came sailing home.  
He rose the latch and went upstairs  
And found an empty room.  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

## II

' I kept her much in the country  
And she was much alone,  
And though she may be there,' he said,  
' She may be in the town.  
She may be all alone there,  
For who can say ? ' he said.  
' I think that I shall find her  
In a young man's bed.'  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

## III

The Colonel met a pedlar,  
Agreed their clothes to swop,  
And bought the grandest jewelry  
In a Galway shop,

Instead of thread and needle  
Put jewelry in the pack,  
Bound a thong about his hand,  
Hitched it on his back.

*The Colonel went out sailing.*

IV

The Colonel knocked on the rich man's door,  
'I am sorry,' said the maid,  
'My mistress cannot see these things,  
But she is still abed,  
And never have I looked upon  
Jewelry so grand.'

'Take all to your mistress,'  
And he laid them on her hand.

*The Colonel went out sailing.*

V

And he went in and she went on  
And both climbed up the stair,  
And O he was a clever man,  
For he his slippers wore.  
And when they came to the top stair  
He ran on ahead,  
His wife he found and the rich man  
In the comfort of a bed.

*The Colonel went out sailing.*

VI

The Judge at the Assize Court,  
When he heard that story told,

Awarded him for damages  
Three kegs of gold.  
The Colonel said to Tom his man,  
‘ Harness an ass and cart,  
Carry the gold about the town,  
Throw it in every part.’  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

## VII

And there at all street-corners  
A man with a pistol stood,  
And the rich man had paid them well  
To shoot the Colonel dead ;  
But they threw down their pistols  
And all men heard them swear  
That they could never shoot a man  
Did all that for the poor.  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

## VIII

‘ And did you keep no gold, Tom ?  
You had three kegs,’ said he.  
‘ I never thought of that, Sir.’  
‘ Then want before you die.’  
And want he did ; for my own grand-dad  
Saw the story’s end,  
And Tom make out a living  
From the seaweed on the strand.  
*The Colonel went out sailing.*

## A MODEL FOR THE LAUREATE

On thrones from China to Peru  
All sorts of kings have sat  
That men and women of all sorts  
Proclaimed both good and great ;  
And what's the odds if such as these  
For reason of the State  
Should keep their lovers waiting,  
    Keep their lovers waiting ?

Some boast of beggar-kings and kings  
Of rascals black and white  
That rule because a strong right arm  
Puts all men in a fright,  
And drunk or sober live at ease  
Where none gainsay their right,  
And keep their lovers waiting,  
    Keep their lovers waiting.

The Muse is mute when public men  
Applaud a modern throne :  
Those cheers that can be bought or sold,  
That office fools have run,  
That waxen seal, that signature.  
For things like these what decent man  
Would keep his lover waiting,  
    Keep his lover waiting ?

## THE OLD STONE CROSS

A statesman is an easy man,  
He tells his lies by rote ;  
A journalist makes up his lies  
And takes you by the throat ;  
So stay at home and drink your beer  
And let the neighbours vote,  
    *Said the man in the golden breastplate*  
    *Under the old stone Cross.*

Because this age and the next age  
Engender in the ditch,  
No man can know a happy man  
From any passing wretch ;  
If Folly link with Elegance  
No man knows which is which,  
    *Said the man in the golden breastplate*  
    *Under the old stone Cross.*

But actors lacking music  
Do most excite my spleen,  
They say it is more human  
To shuffle, grunt and groan,  
Not knowing what unearthly stuff  
Rounds a mighty scene,  
    *Said the man in the golden breastplate*  
    *Under the old stone Cross.*

## THE SPIRIT MEDIUM

Poetry, music, I have loved, and yet  
Because of those new dead  
That come into my soul and escape  
Confusion of the bed,  
Or those begotten or unbegotten  
Perning in a band,  
*I bend my body to the spade*  
*Or grope with a dirty hand.*

Or those begotten or unbegotten,  
For I would not recall  
Some that being unbegotten  
Are not individual,  
But copy some one action,  
Moulding it of dust or sand,  
*I bend my body to the spade*  
*Or grope with a dirty hand.*

An old ghost's thoughts are lightning,  
To follow is to die ;  
Poetry and music I have banished,  
But the stupidity  
Of root, shoot, blossom or clay  
Makes no demand.  
*I bend my body to the spade*  
*Or grope with a dirty hand.*

## THOSE IMAGES

What if I bade you leave  
The cavern of the mind ?  
There's better exercise  
In the sunlight and wind.

I never bade you go  
To Moscow or to Rome.  
Renounce that drudgery,  
Call the Muses home.

Seek those images  
That constitute the wild,  
The lion and the virgin,  
The harlot and the child.

Find in middle air  
An eagle on the wing,  
Recognise the five  
That make the Muses sing.

# THE MUNICIPAL GALLERY REVISITED

## I

Around me the images of thirty years :  
An ambush ; pilgrims at the water-side ;  
Casement upon trial, half hidden by the bars,  
Guarded ; Griffiths staring in hysterical pride ;  
Kevin O'Higgins' countenance that wears  
A gentle questioning look that cannot hide  
A soul incapable of remorse or rest ;  
A revolutionary soldier kneeling to be blessed.

## II

An Abbot or Archbishop with an upraised hand  
Blessing the Tricolour. ' This is not,' I say,  
' The dead Ireland of my youth, but an Ireland  
The poets have imagined, terrible and gay.'  
Before a woman's portrait suddenly I stand,  
Beautiful and gentle in her Venetian way.  
I met her all but fifty years ago  
For twenty minutes in some studio.

## III

Heart-smitten with emotion I sink down,  
My heart recovering with covered eyes ;  
Wherever I had looked I had looked upon  
My permanent or impermanent images :  
Augusta Gregory's son ; her sister's son,  
Hugh Lane, ' onlie begetter ' of all these ;

Hazel Lavery living and dying, that tale  
As though some ballad-singer had sung it all.

IV

Mancini's portrait of Augusta Gregory,  
'Greatest since Rembrandt,' according to John Synge ;  
A great ebullient portrait certainly ;  
But where is the brush that could show anything  
Of all that pride and that humility ?  
And I am in despair that time may bring  
Approved patterns of women or of men  
But not that selfsame excellence again.

V

My mediaeval knees lack health until they bend,  
But in that woman, in that household where  
Honour had lived so long, all lacking found.  
Childless I thought, 'My children may find here  
Deep-rooted things,' but never foresaw its end,  
And now that end has come I have not wept ;  
No fox can foul the lair the badger swept.

VI

(An image out of Spenser and the common tongue.)  
John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought  
All that we did, all that we said or sang  
Must come from contact with the soil, from that  
Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong.  
We three alone in modern times had brought  
Everything down to that sole test again,  
Dream of the noble and the beggar-man.

## VII

And here's John Synge himself, that rooted man,  
' Forgetting human words,' a grave deep face.  
You that would judge me, do not judge alone  
This book or that, come to this hallowed place  
Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon ;  
Ireland's history in their lineaments trace ;  
Think where man's glory most begins and ends,  
And say my glory was I had such friends.

## ARE YOU CONTENT?

I call on those that call me son,  
Grandson, or great-grandson,  
On uncles, aunts, great-uncles or great-aunts,  
To judge what I have done.  
Have I, that put it into words,  
Spoilt what old loins have sent ?  
Eyes spiritualised by death can judge,  
I cannot, but I am not content.

He that in Sligo at Drumcliff  
Set up the old stone Cross,  
That red-headed rector in County Down,  
A good man on a horse,  
Sandymount Corbets, that notable man  
Old William Pollexfen,  
The smuggler Middleton, Butlers far back,  
Half legendary men.

Infirm and aged I might stay  
In some good company,  
I who have always hated work,  
Smiling at the sea,  
Or demonstrate in my own life  
What Robert Browning meant  
By an old hunter talking with Gods ;  
But I am not content.

# THREE SONGS TO THE ONE BURDEN

## I

The Roaring Tinker if you like,  
But Mannion is my name,  
And I beat up the common sort  
And think it is no shame.  
The common breeds the common,  
A lout begets a lout,  
So when I take on half a score  
I knock their heads about.  
*From mountain to mountain ride the  
fierce horsemen.*

All Mannions come from Manannan,  
Though rich on every shore  
He never lay behind four walls  
He had such character,  
Nor ever made an iron red  
Nor soldered pot or pan ;  
His roaring and his ranting  
Best please a wandering man.  
*From mountain to mountain ride the  
fierce horsemen.*

Could Crazy Jane put off old age  
And ranting time renew,  
Could that old god rise up again  
We'd drink a can or two,

And out and lay our leadership  
On country and on town,  
Throw likely couples into bed  
And knock the others down.  
*From mountain to mountain ride the  
fierce horsemen.*

## II

My name is Henry Middleton,  
I have a small demesne,  
A small forgotten house that's set  
On a storm-bitten green.  
I scrub its floors and make my bed,  
I cook and change my plate,  
The post and garden-boy alone  
Have keys to my old gate.  
*From mountain to mountain ride the  
fierce horsemen.*

Though I have locked my gate on them,  
I pity all the young,  
I know what devil's trade they learn  
From those they live among,  
Their drink, their pitch-and-toss by day,  
Their robbery by night ;  
The wisdom of the people's gone,  
How can the young go straight ?  
*From mountain to mountain ride the  
fierce horsemen.*

When every Sunday afternoon  
On the Green Lands I walk

And wear a coat in fashion,  
Memories of the talk  
Of henwives and of queer old men  
Brace me and make me strong ;  
There's not a pilot on the perch  
Knows I have lived so long.  
*From mountain to mountain ride the  
fierce horsemen.*

### III

Come gather round me, players all :  
Come praise Nineteen-Sixteen,  
Those from the pit and gallery  
Or from the painted scene  
That fought in the Post Office  
Or round the City Hall,  
Praise every man that came again,  
Praise every man that fell.  
*From mountain to mountain ride the  
fierce horsemen.*

Who was the first man shot that day ?  
The player Connolly,  
Close to the City Hall he died ;  
Carriage and voice had he ;  
He lacked those years that go with skill,  
But later might have been  
A famous, a brilliant figure  
Before the painted scene.  
*From mountain to mountain ride the  
fierce horsemen.*

Some had no thought of victory  
But had gone out to die  
That Ireland's mind be greater,  
Her heart mount up on high ;  
And yet who knows what's yet to come ?  
For Patrick Pearse had said  
That in every generation  
Must Ireland's blood be shed.  
*From mountain to mountain ride the  
fierce horsemen.*

## IN TARA'S HALLS

A man I praise that once in Tara's Halls  
Said to the woman on his knees, ' Lie still.  
My hundredth year is at an end. I think  
That something is about to happen, I think  
That the adventure of old age begins.  
To many women I have said, " Lie still,"  
And given everything a woman needs,  
A roof, good clothes, passion, love perhaps,  
But never asked for love ; should I ask that,  
I shall be old indeed.'

Thereon the man  
Went to the Sacred House and stood between  
The golden plough and harrow and spoke aloud  
That all attendants and the casual crowd might hear.  
' God I have loved, but should I ask return  
Of God or woman, the time were come to die.'  
He bade, his hundred and first year at end,  
Diggers and carpenters make grave and coffin ;  
Saw that the grave was deep, the coffin sound,  
Summoned the generations of his house,  
Lay in the coffin, stopped his breath and died.

# NEWS FOR THE DELPHIC ORACLE

## I

There all the golden codgers lay,  
There the silver dew,  
And the great water sighed for love,  
And the wind sighed too.  
Man-picker Niamh leant and sighed  
By Oisín on the grass ;  
There sighed amid his choir of love  
Tall Pythagoras.  
Plotinus came and looked about,  
The salt-flakes on his breast,  
And having stretched and yawned awhile  
Lay sighing like the rest.

## II

Straddling each a dolphin's back  
And steadied by a fin,  
Those Innocents re-live their death,  
Their wounds open again.  
The ecstatic waters laugh because  
Their cries are sweet and strange,  
Through their ancestral patterns dance,  
And the brute dolphins plunge  
Until, in some cliff-sheltered bay  
Where wades the choir of love  
Proffering its sacred laurel crowns,  
They pitch their burdens off.

### III

Slim adolescence that a nymph has stripped,  
Peleus on Thetis stares.

Her limbs are delicate as an eyelid,  
Love has blinded him with tears ;  
But Thetis' belly listens.

Down the mountain walls  
From where Pan's cavern is  
Intolerable music falls.

Foul goat-head, brutal arm appear,  
Belly, shoulder, bum,  
Flash fishlike ; nymphs and satyrs  
Copulate in the foam.

## THREE MARCHING SONGS<sup>1</sup>

### I

Remember all those renowned generations,  
They left their bodies to fatten the wolves,  
They left their homesteads to fatten the foxes,  
Fled to far countries, or sheltered themselves  
In cavern, crevice, or hole,  
Defending Ireland's soul.

*Be still, be still, what can be said ?  
My father sang that song,  
But time amends old wrong,  
All that is finished, let it fade.*

Remember all those renowned generations,  
Remember all that have sunk in their blood,  
Remember all that have died on the scaffold,  
Remember all that have fled, that have stood,  
Stood, took death like a tune  
On an old tambourine.

*Be still, be still, what can be said ?  
My father sang that song,  
But time amends old wrong,  
And all that's finished, let it fade.*

Fail, and that history turns into rubbish,  
All that great past to a trouble of fools ;

<sup>1</sup> Rewritten December 1938.

Those that come after shall mock at O'Donnell,  
Mock at the memory of both O'Neills,  
Mock Emmet, mock Parnell,  
All the renown that fell.

*Be still, be still, what can be said ?  
My father sang that song,  
But time amends old wrong,  
And all that's finished, let it fade.*

## II

The soldier takes pride in saluting his Captain,  
The devotee proffers a knee to his Lord,  
Some back a mare thrown from a thoroughbred,  
Troy backed its Helen ; Troy died and adored ;  
Great nations blossom above ;  
A slave bows down to a slave.

*What marches through the mountain pass ?  
No, no, my son, not yet ;  
That is an airy<sup>1</sup> spot,  
And no man knows what treads the grass.*

We know what rascal might has defiled,  
The lofty innocence that it has slain,  
Were we not born in the peasant's cot  
Where men forgive if the belly gain ?  
More dread the life that we live,  
How can the mind forgive ?

<sup>1</sup> 'Airy' may be an old pronunciation of 'erie' often heard in Galway and Sligo.

*What marches down the mountain pass ?  
No, no, my son, not yet ;  
That is an airy spot,  
And no man knows what treads the grass.*

What if there's nothing up there at the top ?  
Where are the captains that govern mankind ?  
What tears down a tree that has nothing within it ?  
A blast of the wind, O a marching wind,  
March wind, and any old tune,  
March, march, and how does it run ?

*What marches down the mountain pass ?  
No, no, my son, not yet ;  
That is an airy spot,  
And no man knows what treads the grass.*

### III

Grandfather sang it under the gallows :  
' Hear, gentlemen, ladies, and all mankind :  
Money is good and a girl might be better,  
But good strong blows are delights to the mind.'  
There, standing on the cart,  
He sang it from his heart.

*Robbers had taken his old tambourine,  
But he took down the moon  
And rattled out a tune ;  
Robbers had taken his old tambourine.*

' A girl I had, but she followed another,  
Money I had, and it went in the night,

Strong drink I had, and it brought me to sorrow,  
But a good strong cause and blows are delight.'  
All there caught up the tune :  
' On, on, my darling man.'

*Robbers had taken his old tambourine,  
But he took down the moon  
And rattled out a tune ;  
Robbers had taken his old tambourine.*

' Money is good and a girl might be better,  
No matter what happens and who takes the fall,  
But a good strong cause ' — the rope gave a jerk there,  
No more sang he, for his throat was too small ;  
But he kicked before he died,  
He did it out of pride.

*Robbers had taken his old tambourine,  
But he took down the moon  
And rattled out a tune ;  
Robbers had taken his old tambourine.*

## LONG - LEGGED FLY

That civilisation may not sink,  
Its great battle lost,  
Quiet the dog, tether the pony  
To a distant post ;  
Our master Caesar is in the tent  
Where the maps are spread,  
His eyes fixed upon nothing,  
A hand under his head.  
*Like a long-legged fly upon the stream*  
*His mind moves upon silence.*

That the topless towers be burnt  
And men recall that face,  
Move most gently if move you must  
In this lonely place.  
She thinks, part woman, three parts a child,  
That nobody looks ; her feet  
Practise a tinker shuffle  
Picked up on a street.  
*Like a long-legged fly upon the stream*  
*Her mind moves upon silence.*

That girls at puberty may find  
The first Adam in their thought,  
Shut the door of the Pope's chapel,  
Keep those children out.  
There on that scaffolding reclines  
Michael Angelo.

With no more sound than the mice make  
His hand moves to and fro.  
*Like a long-legged fly upon the stream*  
*His mind moves upon silence.*

## A B R O N Z E H E A D

Here at right of the entrance this bronze head,  
Human, superhuman, a bird's round eye,  
Everything else withered and mummy-dead.  
What great tomb-haunter sweeps the distant sky  
(Something may linger there though all else die ;)  
And finds there nothing to make its terror less  
*sterica passio* of its own emptiness ?

No dark tomb-haunter once ; her form all full  
As though with magnanimity of light,  
Yet a most gentle woman ; who can tell  
Which of her forms has shown her substance right ?  
Or maybe substance can be composite,  
Profound McTaggart thought so, and in a breath  
A mouthful held the extreme of life and death.

But even at the starting-post, all sleek and new,  
I saw the wildness in her and I thought  
A vision of terror that it must live through  
Had shattered her soul. Propinquity had brought  
Imagination to that pitch where it casts out  
All that is not itself : I had grown wild  
And wandered murmuring everywhere, ' My child,  
my child ! '

Or else I thought her supernatural ;  
As though a sterner eye looked through her eye  
On this foul world in its decline and fall ;

On gangling stocks grown great, great stocks run dry,  
Ancestral pearls all pitched into a sty,  
Heroic reverie mocked by clown and knave,  
And wondered what was left for massacre to save.

## A STICK OF INCENSE

Whence did all that fury come ?  
From empty tomb or Virgin womb ?  
Saint Joseph thought the world would melt  
But liked the way his finger smelt.

JOHN KINSELLA'S LAMENT FOR  
MRS. MARY MOORE

A bloody and a sudden end,  
    Gunshot or a noose,  
For Death who takes what man would keep,  
    Leaves what man would lose.  
He might have had my sister,  
    My cousins by the score,  
But nothing satisfied the fool  
    But my dear Mary Moore,  
None other knows what pleasures man  
    At table or in bed.  
*What shall I do for pretty girls*  
    *Now my old bawd is dead ?*

Though stiff to strike a bargain,  
    Like an old Jew man,  
Her bargain struck we laughed and talked  
    And emptied many a can ;  
And O ! but she had stories,  
    Though not for the priest's ear,  
To keep the soul of man alive,  
    Banish age and care,  
And being old she put a skin  
    On everything she said.  
*What shall I do for pretty girls*  
    *Now my old bawd is dead ?*

The priests have got a book that says  
    But for Adam's sin

Eden's Garden would be there  
And I there within.  
No expectation fails there,  
No pleasing habit ends,  
No man grows old, no girl grows cold,  
But friends walk by friends.  
Who quarrels over halfpennies  
That plucks the trees for bread ?  
*What shall I do for pretty girls*  
*Now my old bawd is dead ?*

## HOUND VOICE

Because we love bare hills and stunted trees  
And were the last to choose the settled ground,  
Its boredom of the desk or of the spade, because  
So many years companioned by a hound,  
Our voices carry ; and though slumber-bound,  
Some few half wake and half renew their choice,  
Give tongue, proclaim their hidden name — ‘ Hound  
Voice.’

The women that I picked spoke sweet and low  
And yet gave tongue. ‘ Hound Voices ’ were they all.  
We picked each other from afar and knew  
What hour of terror comes to test the soul,  
And in that terror’s name obeyed the call,  
And understood, what none have understood,  
Those images that waken in the blood.

Some day we shall get up before the dawn  
And find our ancient hounds before the door,  
And wide awake know that the hunt is on ;  
Stumbling upon the blood-dark track once more,  
Then stumbling to the kill beside the shore ;  
Then cleaning out and bandaging of wounds,  
And chants of victory amid the encircling hounds.

## HIGH TALK

Processions that lack high stilts have nothing that catches  
the eye.

What if my great-granddad had a pair that were twenty  
foot high,

And mine were but fifteen foot, no modern stalks upon  
higher,

Some rogue of the world stole them to patch up a fence  
or a fire.

Because piebald ponies, led bears, caged lions, make but  
poor shows,

Because children demand Daddy-long-legs upon his  
timber toes,

Because women in the upper storeys demand a face at  
the pane,

That patching old heels they may shriek, I take to chisel  
and plane.

Malachi Stilt-Jack am I, whatever I learned has run  
wild,

From collar to collar, from stilt to stilt, from father to  
child.

All metaphor, Malachi, stilts and all. A barnacle goose  
Far up in the stretches of night ; night splits and the  
dawn breaks loose ;

I, through the terrible novelty of light, stalk on, stalk  
on ;

Those great sea-horses bare their teeth and laugh at the  
dawn.

## THE APPARITIONS

Because there is safety in derision  
I talked about an apparition,  
I took no trouble to convince,  
Or seem plausible to a man of sense,  
Distrustful of that popular eye  
Whether it be bold or sly.  
*Fifteen apparitions have I seen ;  
The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.*

I have found nothing half so good  
As my long-planned half solitude,  
Where I can sit up half the night  
With some friend that has the wit  
Not to allow his looks to tell  
When I am unintelligible.  
*Fifteen apparitions have I seen ;  
The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.*

When a man grows old his joy  
Grows more deep day after day,  
His empty heart is full at length,  
But he has need of all that strength  
Because of the increasing Night  
That opens her mystery and fright.  
*Fifteen apparitions have I seen ;  
The worst a coat upon a coat-hanger.*

## A N A T I V I T Y

What woman hugs her infant there ?  
Another star has shot an ear.

What made the drapery glisten so ?  
Not a man but Delacroix.

What made the ceiling waterproof ?  
Landor's tarpaulin on the roof.

What brushes fly and moth aside ?  
Irving and his plume of pride.

What hurries out the knave and dolt ?  
Talma and his thunderbolt.

Why is the woman terror-struck ?  
Can there be mercy in that look ?

## WHY SHOULD NOT OLD MEN BE MAD?

Why should not old men be mad ?  
Some have known a likely lad  
That had a sound fly-fisher's wrist  
Turn to a drunken journalist ;  
A girl that knew all Dante once  
Live to bear children to a dunce ;  
A Helen of social welfare dream,  
Climb on a wagonette to scream.  
Some think it a matter of course that chance  
Should starve good men and bad advance,  
That if their neighbours figured plain,  
As though upon a lighted screen,  
No single story would they find  
Of an unbroken happy mind,  
A finish worthy of the start.  
Young men know nothing of this sort,  
Observant old men know it well ;  
And when they know what old books tell,  
And that no better can be had,  
Know why an old man should be mad.

## THE STATESMAN'S HOLIDAY

I lived among great houses,  
Riches drove out rank,  
Base drove out the better blood,  
And mind and body shrank.  
No Oscar ruled the table,  
But I'd a troop of friends  
That knowing better talk had gone  
Talked of odds and ends.  
Some knew what ailed the world  
But never said a thing,  
So I have picked a better trade  
And night and morning sing :  
*Tall dames go walking in grass-green Avalon.*

Am I a great Lord Chancellor  
That slept upon the Sack ?  
Commanding officer that tore  
The khaki from his back ?  
Or am I de Valéra,  
Or the King of Greece,  
Or the man that made the motors ?  
Ach, call me what you please !  
Here's a Montenegrin lute,  
And its old sole string  
Makes me sweet music  
And I delight to sing :  
*Tall dames go walking in grass-green Avalon.*

With boys and girls about him,  
With any sort of clothes,

With a hat out of fashion,  
With old patched shoes,  
With a ragged bandit cloak,  
With an eye like a hawk,  
With a stiff straight back,  
With a strutting turkey walk,  
With a bag full of pennies,  
With a monkey on a chain,  
With a great cock's feather,  
With an old foul tune.  
*Tall dames go walking in grass-green Avalon.*

## CRAZY JANE ON THE MOUNTAIN

I am tired of cursing the Bishop,  
(Said Crazy Jane)  
Nine books or nine hats  
Would not make him a man.  
I have found something worse  
To meditate on.  
A King had some beautiful cousins,  
But where are they gone ?  
Battered to death in a cellar,  
And he stuck to his throne.  
Last night I lay on the mountain,  
(Said Crazy Jane)  
There in a two-horsed carriage  
That on two wheels ran  
Great-bladdered Emer sat,  
Her violent man  
Cuchulain sat at her side ;  
Thereupon,  
Propped upon my two knees,  
I kissed a stone ;  
I lay stretched out in the dirt  
And I cried tears down.

## THE CIRCUS ANIMALS' DESERTION

### I

I sought a theme and sought for it in vain,  
I sought it daily for six weeks or so.  
Maybe at last, being but a broken man,  
I must be satisfied with my heart, although  
Winter and summer till old age began  
My circus animals were all on show,  
Those stilted boys, that burnished chariot,  
Lion and woman and the Lord knows what.

### II

What can I but enumerate old themes ?  
First that sea-rider Oisín led by the nose  
Through three enchanted islands, allegorical dreams,  
Vain gaiety, vain battle, vain repose,  
Themes of the embittered heart, or so it seems,  
That might adorn old songs or courtly shows ;  
But what cared I that set him on to ride,  
I, starved for the bosom of his faery bride ?

And then a counter-truth filled out its play,  
*The Countess Cathleen* was the name I gave it ;  
She, pity-crazed, had given her soul away,  
But masterful Heaven had intervened to save it.  
I thought my dear must her own soul destroy,  
So did fanaticism and hate enslave it,  
And this brought forth a dream and soon enough  
This dream itself had all my thought and love.

And when the Fool and Blind Man stole the bread  
Cuchulain fought the ungovernable sea ;  
Heart-mysteries there, and yet when all is said  
It was the dream itself enchanted me :  
Character isolated by a deed  
To engross the present and dominate memory.  
Players and painted stage took all my love,  
And not those things that they were emblems of.

### III

Those masterful images because complete  
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began ?  
A mound of refuse or the sweepings of a street,  
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,  
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut  
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,  
I must lie down where all the ladders start,  
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

## POLITICS

*'In our time the destiny of man presents its meaning in political terms.'*—THOMAS MANN

How can I, that girl standing there,  
My attention fix  
On Roman or on Russian  
Or on Spanish politics ?  
Yet here's a travelled man that knows  
What he talks about,  
And there's a politician  
That has read and thought,  
And maybe what they say is true  
Of war and war's alarms,  
But O that I were young again  
And held her in my arms !

# THE MAN AND THE ECHO

## MAN

In a cleft that's christened Alt  
Under broken stone I halt  
At the bottom of a pit  
That broad noon has never lit,  
And shout a secret to the stone.  
All that I have said and done,  
Now that I am old and ill,  
Turns into a question till  
I lie awake night after night  
And never get the answers right.  
Did that play of mine send out  
Certain men the English shot ?  
Did words of mine put too great strain  
On that woman's reeling brain ?  
Could my spoken words have checked  
That whereby a house lay wrecked ?  
And all seems evil until I  
Sleepless would lie down and die.

## ECHO

Lie down and die.

## MAN

That were to shirk  
The spiritual intellect's great work,  
And shirk it in vain. There is no release  
In a bodkin or disease,

Nor can there be work so great  
As that which cleans man's dirty slate.  
While man can still his body keep  
Wine or love drug him to sleep,  
Waking he thanks the Lord that he  
Has body and its stupidity,  
But body gone he sleeps no more,  
And till his intellect grows sure  
That all's arranged in one clear view,  
Pursues the thoughts that I pursue,  
Then stands in judgment on his soul,  
And, all work done, dismisses all  
Out of intellect and sight  
And sinks at last into the night.

ECHO

Into the night.

MAN

O Rocky Voice,  
Shall we in that great night rejoice ?  
What do we know but that we face  
One another in this place ?  
But hush, for I have lost the theme,  
Its joy or night seem but a dream ;  
Up there some hawk or owl has struck,  
Dropping out of sky or rock,  
A stricken rabbit is crying out,  
And its cry distracts my thought.

## CUCHULAIN COMFORTED

A man that had six mortal wounds, a man  
Violent and famous, strode among the dead ;  
Eyes stared out of the branches and were gone.

Then certain Shrouds that muttered head to head  
Came and were gone. He leant upon a tree  
As though to meditate on wounds and blood.

A Shroud that seemed to have authority  
Among those bird-like things came, and let fall  
A bundle of linen. Shrouds by two and three

Came creeping up because the man was still.  
And thereupon that linen-carrier said :  
' Your life can grow much sweeter if you will

' Obey our ancient rule and make a shroud ;  
Mainly because of what we only know  
The rattle of those arms makes us afraid.

' We thread the needles' eyes, and all we do  
All must together do.' That done, the man  
Took up the nearest and began to sew.

' Now must we sing and sing the best we can,  
But first you must be told our character :  
Convicted cowards all, by kindred slain

‘ Or driven from home and left to die in fear.’  
They sang, but had nor human tunes nor words,  
Though all was done in common as before ;

They had changed their throats and had the throats  
of birds.

*January* 13, 1939

## THE BLACK TOWER

Say that the men of the old black tower,  
Though they but feed as the goatherd feeds,  
Their money spent, their wine gone sour,  
Lack nothing that a soldier needs,  
That all are oath-bound men :  
Those banners come not in.

*There in the tomb stand the dead upright,  
But winds come up from the shore :  
They shake when the winds roar,  
Old bones upon the mountain shake.*

Those banners come to bribe or threaten,  
Or whisper that a man's a fool  
Who, when his own right king's forgotten,  
Cares what king sets up his rule.  
If he died long ago  
Why do you dread us so ?

*There in the tomb drops the faint moonlight,  
But wind comes up from the shore :  
They shake when the winds roar,  
Old bones upon the mountain shake.*

The tower's old cook that must climb and clamber  
Catching small birds in the dew of the morn  
When we hale men lie stretched in slumber  
Swears that he hears the king's great horn.

But he's a lying hound :  
Stand we on guard oath-bound !

*There in the tomb the dark grows blacker,  
But wind comes up from the shore :  
They shake when the winds roar,  
Old bones upon the mountain shake.*

*January 21, 1939*

# UNDER BEN BULBEN

## I

Swear by what the sages spoke  
Round the Mareotic Lake  
That the Witch of Atlas knew,  
Spoke and set the cocks a-crow.

Swear by those horsemen, by those women  
Complexion and form prove superhuman,  
That pale, long-visaged company  
That air in immortality  
Completeness of their passions won ;  
Now they ride the wintry dawn  
Where Ben Bulben sets the scene.

Here's the gist of what they mean.

## II

Many times man lives and dies  
Between his two eternities,  
That of race and that of soul,  
And ancient Ireland knew it all.  
Whether man die in his bed  
Or the rifle knocks him dead,  
A brief parting from those dear  
Is the worst man has to fear.  
Though grave-diggers' toil is long,  
Sharp their spades, their muscles strong,  
They but thrust their buried men  
Back in the human mind again.

### III

You that Mitchel's prayer have heard,  
' Send war in our time, O Lord ! '  
Know that when all words are said  
And a man is fighting mad,  
Something drops from eyes long blind,  
He completes his partial mind,  
For an instant stands at ease,  
Laughs aloud, his heart at peace.  
Even the wisest man grows tense  
With some sort of violence  
Before he can accomplish fate,  
Know his work or choose his mate.

### IV

Poet and sculptor, do the work,  
Nor let the modish painter shirk  
What his great forefathers did,  
Bring the soul of man to God,  
Make him fill the cradles right.

Measurement began our might :  
Forms a stark Egyptian thought,  
Forms that gentler Phidias wrought.  
Michael Angelo left a proof  
On the Sistine Chapel roof,  
Where but half-awakened Adam  
Can disturb globe-trotting Madam  
Till her bowels are in heat,  
Proof that there's a purpose set  
Before the secret working mind :  
Profane perfection of mankind.

Quattrocento put in paint  
On backgrounds for a God or Saint  
Gardens where a soul's at ease ;  
Where everything that meets the eye,  
Flowers and grass and cloudless sky,  
Resemble forms that are or seem  
When sleepers wake and yet still dream,  
And when it's vanished still declare,  
With only bed and bedstead there,  
That heavens had opened.

Gyres run on ;

When that greater dream had gone  
Calvert and Wilson, Blake and Claude,  
Prepared a rest for the people of God,  
Palmer's phrase, but after that  
Confusion fell upon our thought.

v

Irish poets, learn your trade,  
Sing whatever is well made,  
Scorn the sort now growing up  
All out of shape from toe to top,  
Their unremembering hearts and heads  
Base-born products of base beds.  
Sing the peasantry, and then  
Hard-riding country gentlemen,  
The holiness of monks, and after  
Porter-drinkers' randy laughter ;  
Sing the lords and ladies gay  
That were beaten into the clay  
Through seven heroic centuries ;  
Cast your mind on other days

That we in coming days may be  
Still the indomitable Irishry.

VI

Under bare Ben Bulben's head  
In Drumcliff churchyard Yeats is laid.  
An ancestor was rector there  
Long years ago, a church stands near,  
By the road an ancient cross.  
No marble, no conventional phrase ;  
On limestone quarried near the spot  
By his command these words are cut

*Cast a cold eye  
On life, on death.  
Horseman, pass by !*

*September 4, 1938*

# LAST PLAYS

1938-1939



# PURGATORY

## PERSONS IN THE PLAY

A BOY

AN OLD MAN

## PURGATORY

SCENE.—*A ruined house and a bare tree in the background.*

BOY

Half-door, hall door,  
Hither and thither day and night,  
Hill or hollow, shouldering this pack,  
Hearing you talk.

OLD MAN

Study that house.  
I think about its jokes and stories ;  
I try to remember what the butler  
Said to a drunken gamekeeper  
In mid-October, but I cannot.  
If I cannot, none living can.  
Where are the jokes and stories of a house,  
Its threshold gone to patch a pig-sty ?

BOY

So you have come this path before ?

OLD MAN

The moonlight falls upon the path,  
The shadow of a cloud upon the house,  
And that's symbolical ; study that tree,  
What is it like ?

BOY

A silly old man.

OLD MAN

It's like — no matter what it's like.

I saw it a year ago stripped bare as now,  
So I chose a better trade.

I saw it fifty years ago  
Before the thunderbolt had riven it,  
Green leaves, ripe leaves, leaves thick as butter,  
Fat, greasy life. Stand there and look,  
Because there is somebody in that house.

*[The BOY puts down pack and stands in the doorway.]*

BOY

There's nobody here.

OLD MAN

There's somebody there.

BOY

The floor is gone, the windows gone,  
And where there should be roof there's sky,  
And here's a bit of an egg-shell thrown  
Out of a jackdaw's nest.

OLD MAN

But there are some  
That do not care what's gone, what's left :  
The souls in Purgatory that come back  
To habitations and familiar spots.

BOY

Your wits are out again.

OLD MAN

Re-live

Their transgressions, and that not once  
But many times ; they know at last  
The consequence of those transgressions  
Whether upon others or upon themselves ;  
Upon others, others may bring help,  
For when the consequence is at an end  
The dream must end ; upon themselves,  
There is no help but in themselves  
And in the mercy of God.

BOY

I have had enough !  
Talk to the jackdaws, if talk you must.

OLD MAN

Stop ! Sit there upon that stone.  
That is the house where I was born.

BOY

The big old house that was burnt down ?

OLD MAN

My mother that was your grand-dam owned it,  
This scenery and this countryside,  
Kennel and stable, horse and hound —  
She had a horse at the Curragh, and there met  
My father, a groom in a training stable,  
Looked at him and married him.  
Her mother never spoke to her again,  
And she did right.

BOY

What's right and wrong ?  
My grand-dad got the girl and the money.

OLD MAN

Looked at him and married him,  
And he squandered everything she had.  
She never knew the worst, because  
She died in giving birth to me,  
But now she knows it all, being dead.  
Great people lived and died in this house ;  
Magistrates, colonels, members of Parliament,  
Captains and Governors, and long ago  
Men that had fought at Aughrim and the Boyne.  
Some that had gone on Government work  
To London or to India came home to die,  
Or came from London every spring  
To look at the may-blossom in the park.  
They had loved the trees that he cut down  
To pay what he had lost at cards  
Or spent on horses, drink and women ;  
Had loved the house, had loved all  
The intricate passages of the house,  
But he killed the house ; to kill a house  
Where great men grew up, married, died,  
I here declare a capital offence.

BOY

My God, but you had luck ! Grand clothes,  
And maybe a grand horse to ride.

OLD MAN

That he might keep me upon his level  
He never sent me to school, but some  
Half-loved me for my half of her :  
A gamekeeper's wife taught me to read,  
A Catholic curate taught me Latin.  
There were old books and books made fine  
By eighteenth-century French binding, books  
Modern and ancient, books by the ton.

BOY

What education have you given me ?

OLD MAN

I gave the education that befits  
A bastard that a pedlar got  
Upon a tinker's daughter in a ditch.  
When I had come to sixteen years old  
My father burned down the house when drunk.

BOY

But that is my age, sixteen years old,  
At the Puck Fair.

OLD MAN

And everything was burnt ;  
Books, library, all were burnt.

BOY

Is what I have heard upon the road the truth,  
That you killed him in the burning house ?

OLD MAN

There's nobody here but our two selves ?

BOY

Nobody, Father.

OLD MAN

I stuck him with a knife,  
That knife that cuts my dinner now,  
And after that I left him in the fire.  
They dragged him out, somebody saw  
The knife-wound but could not be certain  
Because the body was all black and charred.  
Then some that were his drunken friends  
Swore they would put me upon trial,  
Spoke of quarrels, a threat I had made.  
The gamekeeper gave me some old clothes,  
I ran away, worked here and there  
Till I became a pedlar on the roads,  
No good trade, but good enough  
Because I am my father's son,  
Because of what I did or may do.  
Listen to the hoof-beats ! Listen, listen !

BOY

I cannot hear a sound.

OLD MAN

Beat ! Beat !

This night is the anniversary  
Of my mother's wedding night,  
Or of the night wherein I was begotten.

My father is riding from the public-house,  
A whiskey-bottle under his arm.

*[A window is lit showing a young girl.]*

Look at the window ; she stands there  
Listening, the servants are all in bed,  
She is alone, he has stayed late  
Bragging and drinking in the public-house.

BOY

There's nothing but an empty gap in the wall.  
You have made it up. No, you are mad !  
You are getting madder every day.

OLD MAN

It's louder now because he rides  
Upon a gravelled avenue  
All grass to-day. The hoof-beat stops,  
He has gone to the other side of the house,  
Gone to the stable, put the horse up.  
She has gone down to open the door.  
This night she is no better than her man  
And does not mind that he is half drunk,  
She is mad about him. They mount the stairs  
She brings him into her own chamber.  
And that is the marriage-chamber now.  
The window is dimly lit again.

Do not let him touch you ! It is not true  
That drunken men cannot beget,  
And if he touch he must beget  
And you must bear his murderer.  
Deaf ! Both deaf ! If I should throw

A stick or a stone they would not hear ;  
And that's a proof my wits are out.  
But there's a problem : she must live  
Through everything in exact detail,  
Driven to it by remorse, and yet  
Can she renew the sexual act  
And find no pleasure in it, and if not,  
If pleasure and remorse must both be there,  
Which is the greater ?

I lack schooling.

Go fetch Tertullian ; he and I  
Will ravel all that problem out  
Whilst those two lie upon the mattress  
Begetting me.

Come back ! Come back !

And so you thought to slip away,  
My bag of money between your fingers,  
And that I could not talk and see !  
You have been rummaging in the pack.

*[The light in the window has faded out.]*

BOY

You never gave me my right share.

OLD MAN

And had I given it, young as you are,  
You would have spent it upon drink.

BOY

What if I did ? I had a right  
To get it and spend it as I chose.

OLD MAN

Give me that bag and no more words.

BOY

I will not.

OLD MAN

I will break your fingers.

*[They struggle for the bag. In the struggle it drops, scattering the money. The OLD MAN staggers but does not fall. They stand looking at each other. The window is lit up. A man is seen pouring whiskey into a glass.]*

BOY

What if I killed you? You killed my grand-dad,  
Because you were young and he was old.  
Now I am young and you are old.

OLD MAN *[staring at window]*

Better-looking, those sixteen years —

BOY

What are you muttering?

OLD MAN

Younger — and yet  
She should have known he was not her kind.

BOY

What are you saying? Out with it!

*[OLD MAN points to window.]*

My God ! The window is lit up  
And somebody stands there, although  
The floor-boards are all burnt away.

OLD MAN

The window is lit up because my father  
Has come to find a glass for his whiskey.  
He leans there like some tired beast.

BOY

A dead, living, murdered man !

OLD MAN

‘ Then the bride-sleep fell upon Adam ’ :  
Where did I read those words ?

And yet

There’s nothing leaning in the window  
But the impression upon my mother’s mind ;  
Being dead she is alone in her remorse.

BOY

A body that was a bundle of old bones  
Before I was born. Horrible ! Horrible !

*[He covers his eyes.]*

OLD MAN

That beast there would know nothing, being nothing,  
If I should kill a man under the window  
He would not even turn his head.

*[He stabs the BOY.]*

My father and my son on the same jack-knife !

That finishes — there — there — there —

*[He stabs again and again. The window grows dark.*

‘Hush-a-bye baby, thy father’s a knight,

Thy mother a lady, lovely and bright.’

No, that is something that I read in a book,

And if I sing it must be to my mother,

And I lack rhyme.

*[The stage has grown dark except where the tree stands in white light.*

Study that tree.

It stands there like a purified soul,

All cold, sweet, glistening light.

Dear mother, the window is dark again,

But you are in the light because

I finished all that consequence.

I killed that lad because he had grown up,

He would have struck a woman’s fancy,

Begot, and passed pollution on.

I am a wretched foul old man

And therefore harmless. When I have stuck

This old jack-knife into a sod

And pulled it out all bright again,

And picked up all the money that he dropped,

I’ll to a distant place, and there

Tell my old jokes among new men.

*[He cleans the knife and begins to pick up money.*

Hoof-beats ! Dear God,

How quickly it returns — beat — beat — !

Her mind cannot hold up that dream.

Twice a murderer and all for nothing,

And she must animate that dead night

Not once but many times !

O God,  
Release my mother's soul from its dream !  
Mankind can do no more. Appease  
The misery of the living and the remorse of the dead.

THE END

# THE DEATH OF CUCHULAIN

## PERSONS IN THE PLAY

CUCHULAIN

EITHNE INGUBA

AOIFE

EMER

THE MORRIGU, *Goddess of War*

AN OLD MAN

A BLIND MAN

A SERVANT

A SINGER, A PIPER, AND A DRUMMER

began to appear with the first of his collections finding their way back across the Atlantic, and has increased to a point where it assumes a central importance in his work.

Every eye must weep alone  
Till I Will be overthrown

—he declared in the short dedicatory poem prefixed to *Another Time*. The manner and the vision are Blake's; with Auden this is no surprise, for it is a familiar habit of his to assimilate an admired author both in style and perception, and to garnish him with native tricks of his own. In this way Housman, Blake, Eliot, the ballads, and Rilke have all taken punishment from him, and have yielded to his predatory imagination in return a series of unique vantage-points for vision. Here the vision is Blake's, and for Auden it is a new and significant one. It appeared early in the war, when close contemplation of the hideous spiritual complexities of the contemporary scene had combined with his newly-matured responsibility to drive him away from his emotional Communism, his light-fingered, ironic psycho-analysis and his private world of nursery symbolisms into a deadly serious examination of the personal integration of the individual man in collective mankind. And in *Another Time* there are hints that he had found the valuable secret embodied in the Blakean couplet I have just quoted, a secret even more philosophical than poetic, more religious than philosophical, the secret that he holds in common with Shakespeare and Dostoievsky as well as with Blake, and which is at the roots of some of the most striking imaginative work in the world's literature; the doctrine of the abnegation of the individual self and its active agent the will, which being interpreted and extended becomes a positive proclamation of the necessity of active love.

This vision once glimpsed, there can be no reversion. Yet his next poem, *New Year Letter*, betrayed no sign of it; was in fact a pretentious farrago of facile rhymed octosyllabics, embodying series after series of slick and hardly significant highbrow wise-cracks—a panorama, in fact, of intellectual bewilderment, in

That's from the musicians ; I asked them to do that if I was getting excited. If you were as old you would find it easy to get excited. Before the night ends you will meet the music. There is a singer, a piper and a drummer. I have picked them up here and there about the streets, and I will teach them, if I live, the music of the beggar-man, Homer's music. I promise a dance. I wanted a dance because where there are no words there is less to spoil. Emer must dance, there must be severed heads — I am old, I belong to mythology — severed heads for her to dance before. I had thought to have had those heads carved, but no, if the dancer can dance properly no wood-carving can look as well as a parallelogram of painted wood. But I was at my wit's end to find a good dancer ; I could have got such a dancer once, but she has gone ; the tragi-comedian dancer, the tragic dancer, upon the same neck love and loathing, life and death. I spit three times. I spit upon the dancers painted by Degas. I spit upon their short bodices, their stiff stays, their toes whereon they spin like peg-tops, above all upon that chambermaid face. They might have looked timeless, Rameses the Great, but not the chambermaid, that old maid history. I spit ! I spit ! I spit !

*[The stage is darkened, the curtain falls. Pipe and drum begin and continue until the curtain rises on a bare stage. Half a minute later EITHNE INGUBA enters.]*

EITHNE

Cuchulain ! Cuchulain !

*[CUCHULAIN enters from back.]*

I am Emer's messenger,

I am your wife's messenger, she has bid me say

You must not linger here in sloth, for Maeve  
With all those Connacht ruffians at her back  
Burns barns and houses up at Emain Macha :  
Your house at Muirthemne already burns.  
No matter what's the odds, no matter though  
Your death may come of it, ride out and fight.  
The scene is set and you must out and fight.

CUCHULAIN

You have told me nothing. I am already armed,  
I have sent a messenger to gather men,  
And wait for his return. What have you there ?

EITHNE

I have nothing.

CUCHULAIN

There is something in your hand.

EITHNE

No.

CUCHULAIN

Have you a letter in your hand ?

EITHNE

I do not know how it got into my hand.  
I am straight from Emer. We were in some place.  
She spoke. She saw.

CUCHULAIN

This letter is from Emer,  
It tells a different story. I am not to move  
Until to-morrow morning, for, if now,

I must face odds no man can face and live.  
To-morrow morning Conall Caernach comes  
With a great host.

EITHNE

I do not understand.  
Who can have put that letter in my hand ?

CUCHULAIN

And there is something more to make it certain  
I shall not stir till morning : you are sent  
To be my bedfellow, but have no fear,  
All that is written, but I much prefer  
Your own unwritten words. I am for the fight,  
I and my handful are set upon the fight ;  
We have faced great odds before, a straw decided.  
[THE MORRIGU *enters and stands between them.*

EITHNE

I know that somebody or something is there,  
Yet nobody that I can see.

CUCHULAIN

There is nobody.

EITHNE

Who among the gods of the air and upper air  
Has a bird's head ?

CUCHULAIN

Morrigu is headed like a crow.

EITHNE [*dazed*]

Morrighu, war goddess, stands between.  
Her black wing touched me upon the shoulder, and  
All is intelligible.

[THE MORRIGU *goes out.*

Maeve put me in a trance.

Though when Cuchulain slept with her as a boy  
She seemed as pretty as a bird, she has changed,  
She has an eye in the middle of her forehead.

CUCHULAIN

A woman that has an eye in the middle of her forehead !

A woman that is headed like a crow !

But she that put those words into your mouth  
Had nothing monstrous ; you put them there yourself ;  
You need a younger man, a friendlier man,  
But, fearing what my violence might do,  
Thought out these words to send me to my death,  
And were in such excitement you forgot  
The letter in your hand.

EITHNE

Now that I wake

I say that Maeve did nothing out of reason ;  
What mouth could you believe if not my mouth ?

CUCHULAIN

When I went mad at my son's death and drew  
My sword against the sea, it was my wife  
That brought me back.

EITHNE

Better women than I  
Have served you well, but 'twas to me you turned.

CUCHULAIN

You thought that if you changed I'd kill you for it,  
When everything sublunary must change,  
And if I have not changed that goes to prove  
That I am monstrous.

EITHNE

You're not the man I loved,  
That violent man forgave no treachery.  
If, thinking what you think, you can forgive,  
It is because you are about to die.

CUCHULAIN

Spoken too loudly and too near the door ;  
Speak low if you would speak about my death,  
Or not in that strange voice exulting in it.  
Who knows what ears listen behind the door ?

EITHNE

Some that would not forgive a traitor, some  
That have the passion necessary to life,  
Some not about to die. When you are gone  
I shall denounce myself to all your cooks,  
Scullions, armourers, bed-makers, and messengers,  
Until they hammer me with a ladle, cut me with a  
knife,  
Impale me upon a spit, put me to death  
By what foul way best please their fancy,

So that my shade can stand among the shades  
And greet your shade and prove it is no traitor.

CUCHULAIN

Women have spoken so, plotting a man's death.

[*Enter a* SERVANT.

SERVANT

Your great horse is bitted. All wait the word.

CUCHULAIN

I come to give it, but must ask a question.  
This woman, wild with grief, declares that she  
Out of pure treachery has told me lies  
That should have brought my death. What can I do?  
How can I save her from her own wild words?

SERVANT

Is her confession true?

CUCHULAIN

I make the truth!  
I say she brings a message from my wife.

SERVANT

What if I make her swallow poppy-juice?

CUCHULAIN

What herbs seem suitable, but protect her life  
As if it were your own, and should I not return  
Give her to Conall Caernach because the women  
Have called him a good lover.

EITHNE

I might have peace that know  
The Morrigu, the woman like a crow,  
Stands to my defence and cannot lie,  
But that Cuchulain is about to die.

*[Pipe and drum. The stage grows dark for a moment. When it lights up again, it is empty. CUCHULAIN enters wounded. He tries to fasten himself to a pillar-stone with his belt. AOIFE, an erect white-haired woman, enters.]*

AOIFE

Am I recognised, Cuchulain ?

CUCHULAIN

You fought with a sword,  
It seemed that we should kill each other, then  
Your body wearied and I took your sword.

AOIFE

But look again, Cuchulain ! Look again !

CUCHULAIN

Your hair is white.

AOIFE

That time was long ago,  
And now it is my time. I have come to kill you.

CUCHULAIN

Where am I ? Why am I here ?

AOIFE

You asked their leave,  
When certain that you had six mortal wounds,  
To drink out of the pool.

CUCHULAIN

I have put my belt  
About this stone and want to fasten it  
And die upon my feet, but am too weak.  
Fasten this belt.

*[She helps him to do so.]*

And now I know your name,  
Aoife, the mother of my son. We met  
At the Hawk's Well under the withered trees.  
I killed him upon Baile's Strand, that is why  
Maeve parted ranks that she might let you through.  
You have a right to kill me.

AOIFE

Though I have,  
Her army did not part to let me through.  
The grey of Macha, that great horse of yours  
Killed in the battle, came out of the pool  
As though it were alive, and went three times  
In a great circle round you and that stone,  
Then leaped into the pool, and not a man  
Of all that terrified army dare approach ;  
But I approach.

CUCHULAIN

Because you have the right.

AOIFE

But I am an old woman now, and that  
Your strength may not start up when the time comes  
I wind my veil about this ancient stone  
And fasten you to it.

CUCHULAIN

But do not spoil your veil.  
Your veils are beautiful, some with threads of gold.

AOIFE

I am too old to care for such things now.  
[*She has wound the veil about him.*]

CUCHULAIN

There was no reason so to spoil your veil :  
I am weak from loss of blood.

AOIFE

I was afraid,  
But now that I have wound you in the veil  
I am not afraid. But — how did my son fight ?

CUCHULAIN

Age makes more skilful but not better men.

AOIFE

I have been told you did not know his name  
And wanted, because he had a look of me,  
To be his friend, but Conchubar forbade it.

CUCHULAIN

Forbade it and commanded me to fight ;  
That very day I had sworn to do his will,

Yet refused him, and spoke about a look ;  
But somebody spoke of witchcraft and I said  
Witchcraft had made the look, and fought and killed  
him.

Then I went mad, I fought against the sea.

AOIFE

I seemed invulnerable ; you took my sword,  
You threw me on the ground and left me there.  
I searched the mountain for your sleeping-place  
And laid my virgin body at your side,  
And yet, because you had left me, hated you,  
And thought that I would kill you in your sleep,  
And yet begot a son that night between  
Two black thorn-trees.

CUCHULAIN

I cannot understand.

AOIFE

Because about to die !

Somebody comes,  
Some countryman, and when he finds you here,  
And none to protect him, will be terrified.  
I will keep out of his sight, for I have things  
That I must ask questions on before I kill you.

*[She goes. The BLIND MAN of On Baile's Strand comes in. He moves his stick about until he finds the standing stone ; he lays his stick down, stoops and touches CUCHULAIN'S feet. He feels the legs.]*

BLIND MAN

Ah ! Ah !

CUCHULAIN

I think you are a blind old man.

BLIND MAN

A blind old beggar-man. What is your name ?

CUCHULAIN

Cuchulain.

BLIND MAN

They say that you are weak with wounds.  
I stood between a Fool and the sea at Baile's Strand  
When you went mad. What's bound about your hands  
So that they cannot move ? Some womanish stuff.  
I have been fumbling with my stick since dawn  
And then heard many voices. I began to beg.  
Somebody said that I was in Maeve's tent,  
And somebody else, a big man by his voice,  
That if I brought Cuchulain's head in a bag  
I would be given twelve pennies ; I had the bag  
To carry what I get at kitchen doors,  
Somebody told me how to find the place ;  
I thought it would have taken till the night,  
But this has been my lucky day.

CUCHULAIN

Twelve pennies !

BLIND MAN

I would not promise anything until the woman,  
The great Queen Maeve herself, repeated the words.

CUCHULAIN

Twelve pennies ! What better reason for killing a man ?  
You have a knife, but have you sharpened it ?

BLIND MAN

I keep it sharp because it cuts my food.

[*He lays bag on ground and begins feeling* CUCHULAIN's body, his hands mounting upward.

CUCHULAIN

I think that you know everything, Blind Man.  
My mother or my nurse said that the blind  
Know everything.

BLIND MAN

No, but they have good sense.  
How could I have got twelve pennies for your head  
If I had not good sense ?

CUCHULAIN

There floats out there  
The shape that I shall take when I am dead,  
My soul's first shape, a soft feathery shape,  
And is not that a strange shape for the soul  
Of a great fighting-man ?

BLIND MAN

Your shoulder is there,  
This is your neck. Ah ! Ah ! Are you ready, Cuchulain ?

CUCHULAIN

I say it is about to sing.

[*The stage darkens.*

BLIND MAN

Ah ! Ah !

[*Music of pipe and drum, the curtain falls. The*

*music ceases as the curtain rises upon a bare stage. There is nobody upon the stage except a woman with a crow's head. She is THE MORRIGU. She stands towards the back. She holds a black parallelogram, the size of a man's head. There are six other parallelograms near the back-cloth.*

#### THE MORRIGU

The dead can hear me, and to the dead I speak.  
This head is great Cuchulain's, those other six  
Gave him six mortal wounds. This man came first ;  
Youth lingered though the years ran on, that season  
A woman loves the best. Maeve's latest lover,  
This man, had given him the second wound,  
He had possessed her once ; these were her sons,  
Two valiant men that gave the third and fourth ;  
These other men were men of no account,  
They saw that he was weakening and crept in ;  
One gave him the sixth wound and one the fifth ;  
Conall avenged him. I arranged the dance.

[EMER enters. THE MORRIGU places the head of CUCHULAIN upon the ground and goes out. EMER runs in and begins to dance. She so moves that she seems to rage against the heads of those that had wounded CUCHULAIN, perhaps makes movements as though to strike them, going three times round the circle of the heads. She then moves towards the head of CUCHULAIN ; it may, if need be, be raised above the others on a pedestal. She moves as if in adoration or triumph. She is about to prostrate herself before it, perhaps does so, then rises, looking up as if listening ; she seems to hesitate between the head and what she hears.

*Then she stands motionless. There is silence and in the silence a few faint bird notes.*

*The stage darkens slowly. Then comes loud music, but now it is quite different. It is the music of some Irish Fair of our day. The stage brightens. EMER and the head are gone. . . . There is no one there but the three musicians. They are in ragged street-singers' clothes ; two of them begin to pipe and drum. They cease. The street-singer begins to sing.*

#### SINGER

The harlot sang to the beggar-man.  
I meet them face to face,  
Conall, Cuchulain, Usna's boys,  
All that most ancient race ;  
Maeve had three in an hour, they say.  
I adore those clever eyes,  
Those muscular bodies, but can get  
No grip upon their thighs.  
I meet those long pale faces,  
Hear their great horses, then  
Recall what centuries have passed  
Since they were living men.  
That there are still some living  
That do my limbs unclothe,  
But that the flesh my flesh has gripped  
I both adore and loathe.

*[Pipe and drum music.*

Are those things that men adore and loathe  
Their sole reality ?  
What stood in the Post Office  
With Pearse and Connolly ?

What comes out of the mountain  
Where men first shed their blood,  
Who thought Cuchulain till it seemed  
He stood where they had stood ?

No body like his body  
Has modern woman borne,  
But an old man looking back on life  
Imagines it in scorn.  
A statue's there to mark the place,  
By Oliver Sheppard done.  
So ends the tale that the harlot  
Sang to the beggar-man.  
*[Music from pipe and drum.]*

THE END









